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REMEMBERING PETER HARZEM: TEACHER-SCHOLAR EXTRAORDINAIRE

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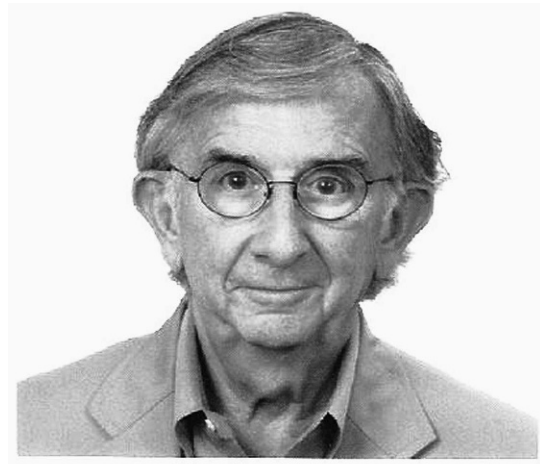
Peter Harzem, the only son of Sukru and Saime Harzem, was born near midnight December 31, 1929 in Istanbul, Turkey, and died at his home in Auburn, Alabama on May 26, 2008 following a long and difficult illness. His beloved wife and best friend, Anne, was at his side at the time of his passing.

In remembering Peter, his students and colleagues are crystal clear about two things. First, in the finest sense of the word, Peter was a scholar—a person who loved knowledge for its own sake and who spent nearly every waking hour pursuing it. Second, Peter was a teacher who genuinely loved sharing his knowledge and ideas with others—students, colleagues, or friends. Indeed, Peter typified the examined life in everything that he did.

Peter developed the scholarly lifestyle as a child growing up in a family and culture that revered books, poetry, art, and music. As Peter told the story, as a child he had aspirations of becoming a fire-engine driver, a cowboy, and a detective, but as the learned culture around him began to take hold, his ambitions changed to becoming a professor or a doctor. One aunt, in particular, had a strong influence on his life. When she was a medical student, he would sit for hours with her as she studied her medical textbooks, paying close attention to what she was learning, so he, too, was soon learning things like anatomy along with her.

For a while Peter toyed with the idea of going to medical school, but could not afford the tuition. He chose instead to do what he considered the next best thing—go to the University of London and acquire a Nurses-Teachers' Diploma. This degree would qualify him to teach physiology, anatomy, and other topics to nurses and medical auxiliaries. He graduated with distinction in 1956 and taught for short stretches first at the School of Nursing, Orpington Hospital in Kent and then at the School of Nursing, Hammersmith Hospital Postgraduate Medical School in London.



Peter Harzem (1929-2008)

However, he could not stay away from the intellectual life and returned to the University of London to study psychology. He graduated with a First Degree Bachelor's of Science (Honors) in psychology in 1963 (only the top one to two percent of graduates earn a First Degree Honors Diploma). Of his many accomplishments, Peter took particular pride in earning this degree.

While studying psychology, Peter felt himself extremely fortunate to meet some of the great names in the history of psychology and

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philosophy—individuals who had enormous influence on shaping his ultimate scholarly interests (Buskist, 2000). Among other intellectual giants of the time, Peter met Piaget, Luria, Boring, Neil Miller, and B. F. Skinner. Some of his professors were also distinguished scholars: C. A. Mace, a linguistic philosopher and psychologist; John Brown, whose experiments on memory are now classics; R. S. Peters, a philosopher of education; and Harry Hurwitz, who established the earliest operant research laboratory in England.

Hurwitz, in particular, had a strong influence over Peter, and they remained dear friends throughout their lives. Hurwitz conducted weekly seminars with his students and often asked prominent scholars to attend. Although Peter was not one of Hurwitz's students, he was nevertheless invited to these gatherings. Hurwitz asked Skinner to one of these meetings, and as Peter told the story, several days after this meeting he received a short note from Skinner complimenting him on some of the comments he had made during the seminar. This event led Peter to read more of Skinner. He then conducted a student-based research project in Hurwitz's laboratory; at his point, Peter was well on his way to developing his passion for the science of behavior.

After graduating from the University of London in 1963, he was invited to do graduate work at Oxford, but instead opted to attend the University of North Wales in Bangor, from which he received his PhD in 1968. From the time he entered North Wales in 1963 until he left the UK for the USA in 1978, Peter served as a Lecturer, first at the Assistant level then at the Senior level.

While at North Wales, Peter worked closely with T.R. Miles, with whom he published *Conceptual Issues in Operant Psychology* (1978), a heady treatise on the theoretical edifice of behavior analysis and a compelling defense of behaviorism. Borrowing from the philosophical positions of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) and especially Gilbert Ryle (1949), Peter and his coauthor offered a conceptual revision of behaviorism, forcefully arguing that many of the great debates in psychology cannot be resolved empirically because they are fundamentally conceptual in nature. Thus, *Conceptual Issues* marked the public beginning of Peter's life-long quest to convince his colleagues and other learned individuals that even the most meticulously designed research is critically flawed if its conceptual basis is unclear, or worse, incorrect. Indeed, the work for which Peter would be known best involved no experimental data whatever; instead, Peter will be remembered for his rigorous and sometimes unflattering theoretical analysis of behavior analysis.

While Peter was honing his analytical skills at North Wales, he was also doing a lot of teaching. Just prior to Peter's arrival at North Wales, the university established a psychology department and called on Miles to lead it. Miles invited Peter to join him in the venture, and together, they developed and taught a far-reaching psychology curriculum. Despite his numerous new ''preps,'' Peter felt fortunate to have the opportunity teach so many courses and said that it helped him acquire a broader and deeper knowledge of psychology. Perhaps this start to his career, combined with his natural curiosity and native intelligence, are the reasons why Peter could talk so articulately about such a wide range of psychological phenomena with colleagues and students, regardless of their training or theoretical proclivities.

One especially important life event occurred while Peter was at North Wales. There he met the love of his life, Anne Laaja Rausberg, a bright, witty, and charming woman from Estonia—they were to be married for over 44 years. Together, they had a daughter, Emma Elvira-Anne Harzem. Just two weeks prior to Peter's death, Emma gave birth to a granddaughter, Tessa Katherine-Anne Slyz. Because of his illness, Peter was unable to travel to New York to greet Tessa as he had longed to. Sadly, Peter died never having seen her.

At the urging of his close friend, Mike Zeiler, a colleague at Emory University, Peter applied for and was offered the position of director of the Experimental Psychology program at Auburn University. So, in 1978, Peter, Anne, and Emma moved to the United States. Although Peter started as an associate professor, he was promoted to full professor the following year. Under Peter's direction, the Experimental program flourished with a decidedly behavior-analytic flavor. When Peter arrived in Auburn, he was only one of two behaviorally-oriented members of the program (the other individual was a clinical faculty

member with a joint appointment in experimental). He soon developed the program—adding me, Jim Johnston, Tom Critchfield, and Chris Newland in the span of just a few years. In 1983, Peter accepted the prestigious Hudson Professorship, an endowed chair with a special emphasis on undergraduate teaching. A year later, Peter became the acting head of the Psychology department, a position in which he worked feverishly until 1987.

During his tenure as acting head, Peter changed the direction of the department in many ways, but probably none more profoundly than in how it approached teaching undergraduates. When Peter became acting head, graduate students with virtually no training in either content or pedagogy taught a preponderance of undergraduate courses. In fact, a student could graduate with a major in psychology without ever having taken a course from a faculty member. Peter made two fundamental changes in the undergraduate program at Auburn. First, he insisted that faculty shoulder more of the responsibility for undergraduate teaching. Within a year, faculty did, in fact, start to do more undergraduate teaching, a tradition now firmly entrenched in the department. Second, Peter revamped the introductory psychology course in a way that provided more faculty involvement and allowed first-year graduate students to receive close supervision and instruction in teaching. He asked faculty to teach large sections of the course two days a week; on a third day, students met in break-out sessions with graduate student teaching assistants. This format allowed graduate students to obtain teaching experience in small sections of the course (25–30 students) under the direct supervision of a faculty supervisor. To set the example for faculty reluctant to teach the course, Peter taught one section a semester for a year while he was acting head. I taught two sections of the course alongside Peter, and before too long more faculty became involved with the course.

Peter took enormous pride in being a teacher and for improving the overall quality of undergraduate teaching in the department. He once remarked to me that there was no more important task before a professor than teaching. When I replied, ''What about research?,'' he answered me, like he always did when I queried him, with another question—''What good is knowledge if it is not shared? And who will share it, if not teachers?'' For Peter, there was no real distinction between teaching and research. I never once heard him speak of these two activities as being mutually exclusive—it was never teaching *versus* research, it was always teaching *and* research. Peter confided to me once that after he was retired and gone from the department he wished to be remembered first and foremost as an admirer and teacher of ideas.

Peter's impact on his much beloved graduate students was even more profound and decidedly more personal. He formed very close working relationships with them, and although he treated them warmly, he would challenge them directly, often ferociously, to clear up anything that remotely resembled what he referred to as ''muddled thinking.'' Many a graduate student was humbled to the quick through Peter's incessant and deliberate questioning of even the most off-hand and casual remarks made during class or the more informal meetings he held at his house. Although one would think that such an approach would strike fear and trembling into the hearts and minds of these students, the effect was quite the opposite. To be sure, Peter's students revered him in ways that reflected their deep and abiding respect. Dave Morgan (Spalding University; personal communication) summed up Peter's influence this way:

> What I recall most vividly about Peter as an instructor was his near disdain for the conventional trappings of pedagogical structure: exams, papers, grading, etc. You got the impression that he viewed this as administratively necessary busywork, not the intellectual adventure that learning should be. In class, he wanted you to have a discussion with him about important ideas, elegant experiments, and the theoretical and conceptual foundations of our discipline, and he simply assumed that you would hold up your end of the bargain by doing the necessary reading and prep work to make this interchange beneficial. If you hadn't, you felt justifiably embarrassed and declined making that mistake again. If you were prepared, however, class time was a treat because you had the opportunity to listen to a remarkable scholar describe, with unparalleled eloquence, the history of psychology, behavior theory, and the conceptual foibles of cognitive science. As students, annual trips to the ABA convention convinced us of just how lucky we

> were to sit in his classroom. We discovered that Peter's classroom lectures, sprinkled with cogent conceptual analyses, humorous asides, and personal anecdotes, offered an intellectual repast seldom heard from speakers at the convention, including those we knew to be among the most eminent figures in behavior analysis.

Of course, Peter's influence as a teacher-scholar transcended the classrooms at Auburn, and permeated behavior analysis at both the national and international levels. He often spoke before standing-room only audiences at ABA about the need for conceptual revision within behavior analysis and the problems of smuggling everyday language into the scientific analysis of behavior.

Throughout his career, Peter worked tirelessly as author and editor. He published widely in journals such as the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior* (*JEAB*), *The Behavior Analyst*, *The Psychological Record*, and the *Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis*. Not one to narrow his interest down to a single focus, Peter published in the areas of temporal control of behavior, schedule effects, magnitude of reinforcement, verbal behavior, human performance, James B. Watson, and of course, conceptual issues in behavior analysis.

Peter served as a member of *JEAB's* editorial board from 1976–1983 when he became an Associate Editor (1983–1987). Together with his close friend and colleague Andy Lattal (West Virginia University), Peter coedited the very first special issue of *JEAB*, devoted to current trends and future directions in the field (1984, *42, 3*). Actually, the idea to gather together the field's leading researchers and scholars to review the past and anticipate the future of behavior analysis was the brainchild of Don Hake (West Virginia University) who died unexpectedly in 1982. Peter and Andy followed through on Don's vision by convening a special conference on the University of West Virginia campus in Don's honor in 1983. Many of the articles that appeared in the special issue grew out of talks given at this meeting (Lattal & Harzem, 1984). Working unselfishly on behalf of his colleagues in this style typified Peter's deep appreciation for the insightful thinking and creative work of others.

Peter also worked closely with his friend Mike Zeiler to coedit an influential three-volume series entitled *Advances in analysis of behavior* (Wiley). Each volume centered on a major issue of the day: reinforcement (Zeiler & Harzem, 1979); prediction, correlation, and contiguity (Harzem, 1981), and biological bases of learning (Zeiler & Harzem, 1983). Nearly 30 years later, these books still serve as cogent reminders of, and valuable resources on, the key developments that have lead to our current understanding of these issues.

Much of Peter's work later in his career focused on the International Congress on Behaviorism and the Sciences of Behavior, a biannual, multidisciplinary conference that he and Emilo Ribes-Inesta created in 1991 (Ribes-Inesta, 2008). The first gathering of the congress took place the following year in Guadalajara, Mexico, and brought together a stellar collection of international scholars and scientists whose primary interests rest in understanding the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of the science of behavior, regardless of academic discipline. The congress is truly international, having been held in nine different countries including once in the US (Auburn). There is currently some discussion of one more congress in 2009—to honor Peter Harzem.

Peter's work on the international scene actually started long before he and Emilio co-founded the international congress. He was a frequent visitor to foreign universities, and gave invited addresses in Brazil, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Spain, and Switzerland. He published frequently in the *Mexican Journal of Behavior Analysis* and his writings have been translated into Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. He also served on the editorial boards of journals published in Brazil, England, Mexico, Spain, and, of course, the USA.

Tom Critchfield (Illinois State University; personal communication), who was a colleague of Peter's at Auburn for 7 years noted that Peter's work on the international level was truly innovative:

> Peter was a pioneer in organizing international conferences that both brought accomplished US scholars abroad and assigned pivotal roles to scholars from outside the US. Now that ABA has embraced this approach with its regular series of international meetings, and now that the international market is becoming a major growth area for behavior analysis, it is easy to overlook how US-centric our field was 15 or 20

> years ago. When Peter began planning the international congresses on behaviorism, it might have seemed foolish to make ''remote'' regions an organizing principle, but history, I think, is proving Peter's vision to be sound. Indeed, though in an actuarial sense international behavior analysis remains in the minority, some would argue that much of the conceptual innovation in behavior analysis during the past two decades has its roots outside the US.

Although Peter's battle with cancer slowed him down, it did not deter him from trying to maintain his professional life and work (e.g., Harzem, 2007). He retained personal ties to his closest colleagues through the world, and continued to plug away at what would become, at his death, unfinished business: a book on the unfair discrediting of John B. Watson. As Ribes-Inesta (2008, p. 494), so eloquently phrased it:

> Peter's commitment to restore the actual figure of Watson and to tell the truth about his life, deeds, and ideas was something more than a momentary interest. It was an act of congruity with his ethical and moral feelings and a personal effort to show that scientific endeavor is not foreign to fraud, dishonesty, and hypocrisy.

What will become of this partially completed manuscript is not known. Peter had hoped that his daughter, Emma, herself an accomplished writer, would finish the book. Let us hope so—it would not only be a long overdue tribute to Watson, but an equally fitting tribute to Peter whose final creative act would otherwise remain incomplete and unknown.

As some readers will have noticed, I have not mentioned anything about how many papers and books Peter published or the many honors that he received. Peter did not place much value on the quantity of one's published works or the number of honors they received. He would not want his life to be summarized by a tally of his writings, a regaling of his awards and honors, or a reading of his *vita*. Rather, he would want us to remember the great themes of his life—his love of family, books, music, art, and culture. He would want us to recall his steady and deep admiration for his friends, his unwavering faith in the truth to ''will out'' over ignorance, his steadfast belief that hope always triumphs over doubt, and his cardinal value that all of us have a duty to help each other become better citizens.

So let us remember Peter Harzem in this way and not forget the important lessons about seeking—and finding—nature's truths that he shared with us in such meaningful and personally profound ways as our friend, colleague, and teacher.

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